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ABSTRACT

The primary objectives of the Mexican American Project at Sacramento State College are to prepare "agents of change" through the applied social sciences, to work within the culture of the schools, to increase the opportunities for the Mexican American learner, to further the concept of involvement of the Spanish-speaking community in the education of the Mexican American learner, to help assess needs of the Mexican American child, and to develop relevant curriculums based on the language and culture of the child. This paper discusses some of the specific accomplishments and objectives of the project in terms of general bilingual education needs and problems. (Author/VM)

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BILINGUALISM, THE MEXICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT, AND HIS COMMUNITY

By Juan A. Lezama

Es un placer para mi estar con ustedes en estos momentos y compartir algunos de mis ideas. Now for all of you that couldn't understand what I said: "It is a pleasure to be here and share some of my ideas with all of you."

Que es lo que esa musica representa para ustedes? What does this music mean to you? To me and the millions of Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest it represents a lot. There is a way of life that is symbolically represented by this music that should be respected and given value; our family, our culture, our community, our language.

Some of the points that I hope to cover during the next 15 minutes will illustrate the importance of the way of life of the Mexican American student in respect to his education:

1. I will say a few words about community involvement and accountability in bilingual education.
2. I will talk about field-oriented training for bilingual-bicultural teachers.
3. I will say a few words about making school real for the Mexican American child.
4. I will talk about the Mexican American Education Project as a functioning model for the above.
5. I will mention some common failures in bilingual education.
6. I will offer some suggestions for improving the education of Mexican American students.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

It has been proven through research that Mexican American parents are as interested in the education of their children as any other parent. By providing information and guidance to parents; in overseeing the

FL 002 516

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educational process within bilingual education programs, one offers the opportunity to parents to become more aware and to participate more actively in the decision making affecting the education of their children.

As college students with the Mexican American Education Project we often inform the parents of their right and obligation to make changes in school policy in order to make the school program valid for their children. One way we help is in providing assistance on how to request changes in school policy and to whom these requests are submitted.

Support for bilingual education might result when the parents participate and account whether or not their child's needs are being met. Through community participation and accountability all existing talents and resources are explored and combined to benefit the learner.

The use of the concept of community accountability helps avoid perpetuating the dangerous pitfall of the false hope of the past and encourages the philosophy of self-determination by the target population. Educational personnel in the past have planned instructional programs with monolingual, monocultural and ethnocentric orientation. Do we know what goes on in the community? Should the educational process consider the real world faced by the child outside of the school?

FIELD ORIENTED TRAINING

The Mexican American Education Project recognizing this obligation; this need; provides practicum courses which take 60 college students into the elementary schools with a large Mexican American population.

The primary objectives of the Mexican American Project at Sacramento State College is to prepare "agents of change" through the applied Social Sciences, to work within the culture of the schools, to increase the educational opportunities for the Mexican American learner, to further the concept of involvement of the Spanish-speaking community in the education of the Mexican American learner, to help assess needs of the Mexican American child and to develop relevant curriculum based on the language and culture of the child.

A logical question one would ask is what significant changes have occurred with this involvement? One of the many positive changes that has occurred in the schools with which we have been involved, has been the observable change in the Anglo-oriented teachers' attitude toward the Mexican American child, the Anglo-oriented teacher begins to see positive side of the Mexicanness of the child, because of the insight that the participating college students give. The change in the way teachers approach the Mexican American child, and the teaching technique takes a turn for the best. Through the imput of these college students, the teacher gains a broader perspective of the Mexican American culture, language, and history, which then provide a more enriched classroom environment to lower the drop-out rate.

But the most important contribution these college students make is the positive self-concept they help instill in the Mexican American child: by providing a role model in that the child identifies with, because of similarity in the language, culture, values, and moral modes of behavior. Through this element of self-identification process, the child is motivated to produce to his full capacity in both cultures. These college students working on a one to one basis with the withdrawn child and the Spanish monolingual derives great benefits which are

appreciated not only by the teacher, but by the child and the parents.

The Mexican American Education Project does not stop with classroom involvement, its activities are carried over into the community. The college students help provide outlets for expression of culture enrichment to the community which brings self-awareness and pride, such as: 5 de Mayo, Virgin de Guadalupe, the posadas, etc.: initiate a Breakfast for Ninos Program, initiate a bilingual-bicultural radio program using the State College radio station, facilitate community organization for raising $1800 for adding playground equipment and a bilingual library for a local elementary school. Help initiate and operate a bilingual, community-run Headstart Program, evaluate Title VII Bilingual Education programs funded in California, giving special attention to community involvement aspects, mediate in a situation at a local high school where racial violence closed down the school. The results in that situation is that two of our participants are presently teaching the only Chicano studies course at the school which has low income children and attend community meetings, take part in bringing together various elements of the community for creative group activities--to oppose the closing down of a barrio school, to produce three major Mexican plays in Spanish, to produce a Christmas program for the Spanish-speaking community.

Let me summarize my remarks by listing some common failures in the bilingual programs:

1. Translating Anglo curriculum into bilingual programs.

2. Stereotyping the Mexican American child by the Anglo teacher.

3. Segregation of the Mexican American child.

4. ESL assimilation thrust.

5. Lack of empathy on the part of the staff.

6. A bilingual aide does not make a bilingual program.

7. A foreign language teacher does not make a bilingual-bicultural teacher.

8. The plan of instruction does not mirror the needs of the community.

9. Machinery or material will not take the place of an efficient teacher.

10. Self-identity is often overlooked.

The teaching techniques and curriculum implemented by Title VII administrators have not usually developed for use with the Mexican American child. The curriculum and techniques are Anglo-super-middle-class oriented. The bilingual program does not allevaite the problem, because for the most part the bilingual curriculum is a translation of these Anglo-oriented programs. They do not take into consideration the dialect or the culture of the Mexican American child.

Another asset on having the college student in a community is that he becomes aware of the needs assessment to be considered in implementing a bilingual-bicultural program, and he can guide the parents and community in establishing curriculum objectives, after they have evaluated the various needs for the program. The needs assessment must consider the heterogeneous nature of the Mexican American community rather than stereotyping and assuming that all Mexican American communities have the same characteristics. The bilingual program design for a school in a transfer pattern community would differ from the design needed for a maintenance community.

These following objectives are examples of what can be used in developing curriculum materials for particular communities.

1. Background in cultural heritage in order to develop a sense of pride in the child.

2. Enrich the child's own language as well as increase his knowledge of English. Do not postpone learning; not just cognitive but the affective domain.

3. Self-enhancement helps to develop and adequate personality, positive view of self, and acceptance of oneself and others.

4. To encourage and emphasize the importance and power of a bilingual-bicultural society.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF A BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL PROGRAM

1. That a complete need assessment be conducted before implementing program.

2. Relevant curriculum developed by professionals from the target population.

3. Stronger community involvement components.

4. Involve more Spanish-speaking college students in fieldwork helping to train them as future teachers, yet benefiting from their present energy and enthusiasm.

5. Involve Anglo as well as target population learners in bilingual education programs.

6. Utilize staff proficiency in the language and background of target population in planning operations and evaluations.

7. Strengthen in-service and staff development at the emotional level.

8. That we utilize various teaching strategies that encourage the child home-centered approach rather than the school-society approach.